

# Departing Ridge praised as 'dedicated'

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge warned that terrorists might strike again even as he sought to reassure Americans their government was working to protect them during a sometimes bumpy reorganization.

As Ridge announced his resignation Tuesday, he confidently noted that it had been nearly one year since the administration raised the national threat level. There hasn't been a strike on U.S. soil since Sept. 11, 2001. He said he was certain the country is safer, that terrorists realize its airlines, ports and borders are more secure.

Ridge will remain in the job through Feb. 1, partly because of increased risks of a terror attack around the holidays and the presidential inauguration.

His message: Safer, but not safe.

"Secretary Ridge was an extremely bright individual dedicated to what the mission was," said Ed Worthington, Mississippi's homeland security chief. His leadership will be missed, he said.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, Worthington, then a deputy director at CIA headquarters, helped brief Ridge.

Mississippi received about \$30 million for homeland security support in 2004 and \$22 million in 2003. The funds helped train emergency personnel in case of a terrorist attack, Worthington said.

Critics said Ridge's legacy is mixed at the sprawling bureaucracy of the Homeland Security Department, a collection of 22 agencies with more than 180,000 employees.

He faced criticism over frequent but vague public warnings about possible terror activity and he was ridiculed last year for urging homeowners to stock up on duct tape and plastic sheeting to fend off biological attacks.

Possible successors include Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson, and Frances Townsend, the White House homeland security adviser.



Ridge

Staff writer Andy Kanengiser contributed to this report.